

American peregrine falcon

Status

Federal status: G4T3 N3BN3N, Not listed

NH state status: S1, Endangered

ME state status: S1, Endangered

Pesticide and PCB poisoning caused dramatic population declines during the 1950s through the mid-1970s. Peregrines were extirpated from large areas of their former range, particularly along the eastern coast of the U.S. It was federally listed as endangered until recently. It is currently recovering throughout much of its range. The American peregrine falcon was delisted by the USFWS in 1999 because it has recovered following restrictions on organochlorine pesticides in the U.S. and Canada, reintroduction efforts, and improved management. It must be listed as a Regional Foresters Sensitive Species for at least 5 years after delisting. Reintroduction efforts have been successful in the eastern portion of its range, but natural recolonization of this area by wild birds has not occurred.

A cliff-nesting population of peregrines was reestablished in northern NY and New England, and was monitored from 1984-1996. Occupied territories grew at an annual rate of 16% with average productivity of 1.29 fledglings/territorial pair and nest success of 73%. Lower reproductive performance in the White Mountain subpopulation was significantly correlated to a lower percentage of rock doves and mourning doves in their diet. Because doves are primarily associated with agricultural habitats, geographic variability in reproductive performance within this region may ultimately be related to habitat differences.

The expert panel indicated that outcomes are currently B across the species' range and also on the WMNF. Given expected management on all lands the panel believes that the likely outcome in 20 years for the species across its range is B changing to A. This is because the subspecies has recovered following restrictions on organochlorine pesticides in the US and Canada, there is an increase in nesting and breeding pairs with fledged young. Also, the peregrine falcon has strong public support. On the WMNF the panel predicts a B increasing to a high B-A. They are concerned about an increase of human activity near the cliff sites on the WMNF.

Distribution

Breeds from interior Alaska, south of the Brooks Range eastward across Canada, south to Baja California, northern Mexico, Colorado, and New England. Recently reintroduced and reestablished as a breeding bird in parts of the northeastern U.S. Winters from southern Alaska, coastal British Columbia, and the central U.S. to South America. It is at the edge of range in northern New England, and is a long distance migrant.

In 1975, 25 historical nest sites in New Hampshire were located and surveyed, but none were active. At least nine of these were on the WMNF: Hogsback Ridge, Sugarloaf Mountain, Black Mountain, Rattlesnake Mountain, Mt. Huntington, Greeley Pond, Table Mountain/Moat Mountain, Frankenstein Ledge, and Mt. Willey. Another 4 occur very near the Forest border and may be on or off-Forest, depending on exact location. In

Maine, historic nest sites (1880-1975) were documented in Bar Harbor, Carrying Place TWP, Jonesport, Addison, Mount Desert, Clifton, Woodstock, Gilead, Mason TWP, T15 R9 WELS, Mt Katahdin TWP, T03 R11 WELS, Andover West Surplus, and T03 R12 WELS. None were on the WMNF.

From 1976-1986 more than 75 captive-reared peregrines were introduced to the wild from 2 release sites on the WMNF in NH. From 1981-2002, there were nest sites in Crawford Notch (2), Dixville(2), Franconia (1), Albany (1), Bartlett (1), Benton (1), Kilkenny (1), Livermore/Lincoln (1), Lyme (1), Manchester (1), Rumney (1), Stark (2), and Woodstock (1). Seven of these (Kilkenny, Bartlett, Albany, Livermore, Woodstock, Crawford and Franconia Notch) are in the WMNF. In Maine from 1987-1996, nesting adults or fledglings were seen in Batchelder's Grant (1), C Surplus (1), Southwest Harbor (1), Verona (1), Peru (1), Dead River TWP (1), Upper Enchanted (1), Kineo TWP (1), T6 North of Weld (1), T04 R10 WELS (1), T06 R08 WELS (1), and Mount Desert (1). In addition, falcons were hacked from three locations that have not been used as eyries in Mount Desert (1), Elliottsville TWP (1), and Amherst (1). The Batchelder's Grant nest is in the WMNF.

Habitat

The American peregrine falcon breeds in open habitats from tundra and seacoasts to high mountains and open forested regions, typically where there are rocky cliffs with ledges overlooking rivers, streams, lakes, or coastal bays that have abundant birds. It sometimes nests on tall buildings. Winters along the coast. In New Hampshire, nest sites are on cliffs at 800' to 3,000' elevation.

Limiting Factors

Primary threats include human disturbance, raccoon predation, and pesticides. Although contamination from pesticides in Canada and the U.S. is down, threats of contaminants in bird and waterfowl prey in Central and South America and Mexico still persist. Threats also include killing by hunters and the sport of falconry, which takes birds and eggs from nests. Predation from great horned owls was a serious threat to hacked falcons in the Mississippi River Valley. Availability of prey may become a future problem as many passerine bird populations decline.

Viability concern

This species was recently delisted and must be monitored for at least 5 years to ensure continued recovery. Outcomes are likely to continue improving over the next 20 years, so viability should not be a concern in the long-term, but must be watched closely in the short-term.

Management activities that might affect populations or viability

Recreation development and heavy recreational use near nest sites could affect nesting peregrine falcons, reducing nesting success. Primary uses include hiking and rock climbing. Current management closes these areas during the nesting season.

Management that provides a wide variety of habitats to support passerine birds will help maintain prey levels sufficient for peregrine nesting success.

References

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